Catholic Memories of the Tower of London.

FIRST SERIES.

I. BISHOP FISHER. II. SIR THOMAS MORE.

BEING THE SUBSTANCE OF TWO LECTURES

DELIVERED AT THE TEMPORARY CHURCH OF THE ENGLISH MARTYRS, TOWER HILL,

BY

VERY REV. ROBERT COOKE,

PROV. O.M.I.

With an Appendix

CONTAINING

BISHOP FISHER'S SPIRITUAL CONSOLATION TO HIS SISTER WRITTEN IN THE TOWER ON THE EVE OF HIS MARTYRDOM.

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I. BISHOP FISHER.

The Tower of London, considered as a fortress, a palace, and a prison, has attached to it historical reminiscences fraught with the deepest interest. Blended with its general history there are memories which possess a special attraction for the Catholic mind. The Catholic traditions of the Tower present to us some of the fairest and brightest, as well as some of the saddest yet the most glorious, records of that ancient monument. For centuries, at various intervals, many of the kings and queens of England resided therein. There King Stephen kept court during the festival of Whitsuntide. There Henry III., third founder of Westminster Abbey, spent considerable portions of the year with his family. On such occasions large distributions of food and clothing to the poor were frequently made at the gates, and the royal children were often employed, under the encouraging eyes of their parents, in ministering with their youthful hands food and raiment to the poor members of Jesus Christ. During one of the periods of her residence at the Tower, Eleanor of Provence, wife of Henry III., refounded St. Katherine's Hospital.*

* The heart of Queen Eleanor was conveyed by her son Edward I. from the convent of Ambresbury, where she died, to the church of the Nuns of St. Clare, commonly called the Minories, near the Tower, where it was honourably interred in presence of a great multitude on the feast of St. Nicholas.

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In the year 1223, the King of Jerusalem, John de Brienne, and the Grand Master of the Knights Hospitallers, having come to England to seek aid for the relief of the Holy Land against the Saracens, were received with splendid hospitality at the Tower, where they stayed for some months. At an earlier date we find St. Thomas of Canterbury living in the Tower, on his being named Constable of that royal residence.

I hasten to speak of a pageant which would seem to close the bright Catholic memories of the Tower of London, and to introduce others of a more sorrowful, but of a holier and grander type. Henceforward, to Catholic eyes and hearts, it will cease to be simply the abode of kings and warriors, only to be looked upon as a shrine sanctified by the memory of holy martyrs. Its vaults and dungeons will be trodden with uncovered head and reverent step, as are those of the Catacombs, for they will recall deeds of Christian heroism as glorious as those recorded in early times.

On the morning of the 23d of June 1509, a marriage procession issued forth from the Tower; it was that of the youthful Henry and the chaste and beautiful Princess Katherine of Aragon. From hence it went forth through the streets of London. The inhabitants of Cornhill, as the richest citizens, displayed cloth of gold. Along that street, to the 'Change, the way was lined with young maidens dressed in virgin white, bearing palms of white wax in their hands. Priests in rich robes censed the queen's procession with silver censers as it passed. Of all the pageants ever devised for royalty this was the most ideal and beautiful. Thus speaks a modern biographer of Katherine of Aragon.

Could any one of those who saw that bright mar-

riage procession coming forth from the gates of the Tower have looked into the near future, what strange contrasts would he not have beheld! He would have seen, as the direct sequences of that feast, other processions coming also from thence and ascending the hill of the Tower—the processions of martyrs on the way to the place of their martyrdom; he would have seen their faces bright as that of the bridegroom, and he would have heard them singing the marriage song. Foremost amongst that happy crowd of blessed martyrs, he would have beheld an aged Bishop, tall and venerable, and bowed under the weight of fourscore years—the glorious Fisher, who suffered death on Tower Hill for refusing to deny that Katherine, the pure and holy, was Henry's lawful wedded wife; and for maintaining, in spite of the royal usurpations, the ecclesiastical supremacy of the Holy See.

As centuries pass by, our Lord, as Redeemer and Saviour of men, would seem to reappear on earth in certain holy personages, who rise up one by one, as the world needs them, to save a nation or an epoch from entire perdition and utter darkness. Such a blessed appearance in his day was John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester. He was born at Beverley in Yorkshire. His early education was conducted by a holy priest, who was attached to the collegiate church of that town. He made rapid progress in his elementary studies, and at a proper age was transferred to Cambridge. He soon became a shining light in that university; rapidly he rose to its highest honours, until at last we find him named its *perpetual* Chancellor. He was the first on whom this great distinction had been conferred. In the mean time Fisher was ordained priest. This period of his life was marked by his pro-

found study of the sacred Scriptures, and of the writings of the Fathers. Hitherto he seems to have lived within the secluded circle of literature and piety; but so great a light was not to be hidden under a bushel. God was to call him forth to become a guide of souls, a benefactor to the poor, a light to the clergy, and a noble confessor of the faith. One of the first who recognised his rare merits as a director of souls, was the illustrious Princess Margaret, Countess of Richmond, mother of the then reigning monarch, Henry VII. This virtuous lady was possessed of great wealth, which she resolved to employ in good works. Fisher was her chosen guide in the exercise of her charities, and marvellous were the fruits of a benevolence thus wisely directed. Under the prompting of Fisher, she devoted large sums to such works as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, paying the debts of poor prisoners, sheltering orphans, giving marriage portions to virtuous young women, founding hospitals and asylums for various forms of human infirmity. But the piercing glance of Fisher's mind discovered another evil, which was descending gradually as a death-pall upon the whole nation: it was the increasing ignorance in matters of science and religion of all classes of society, the clergy as well as the laity, the noble and the plebeian. What loftier charity than that of substituting light for this coming darkness? To this grand form of benevolence Fisher devoted himself, and generously was he seconded by the Princess Margaret. Schools and colleges were established by their joint coöperation. Two new colleges were founded at Cambridge—Christ Church and St. John the Evangelist's; to Christ's College Fisher was a large benefactor, and he was

chosen its visitor for life. Many of the martyrs and confessors of the faith in the sixteenth century came forth from this seminary; amongst whom may be mentioned Richard, Reginald, and William Exmew, who suffered martyrdom the same year and for the same cause as Fisher; and Richard Hall, the biographer of the prelate, who, having studied at Christ's College, died at Cambrai, whither he fled in order freely to practise his religion. Lady Margaret, acting under the advice of Fisher, commenced the foundation of the College of St. John the Evangelist at Cambridge, but she died before she could complete the undertaking. The task was taken in hand by Fisher, who, out of his own resources, and by imposing great privations on himself, was enabled to accomplish the object so dear to his heart. In 1516 he blessed the new college and published its statutes, which he himself had drawn up; and to it he left by will his library, which was considered to contain the largest and most precious collection of books in possession of any prelate of that day. It was chiefly to Fisher's instrumentality that was due the introduction at Cambridge of the study of Greek and Hebrew; and at his own expense he founded the first chairs of these languages in the university. But whilst thus occupied in the promotion of classical and linguistic knowledge, he did not neglect to labour for the advancement of the higher science of Scripture and divinity. Aided by the Princess Margaret, he established at Oxford and Cambridge divinity professorships, named after the benefactress, the Lady Margaret's, for the expounding of Holy Scripture and the instruction of young preachers. Not content with these foundations, the zeal of Fisher would fain embrace the whole kingdom

in its grasp. He mourned over the decay of piety throughout the land, which he knew arose in the main from the neglect of the appointed shepherds to feed their flocks with the food of heavenly instruction. With the view of remedying this evil in some measure, he obtained from the Holy See a precious right for the University of Cambridge, that of sending forth every year twelve chosen preachers, authorised by apostolic indult to announce the divine word to clergy and people in every part of the three kingdoms; the only preliminary condition required, being the consent of the rectors in whose churches they preached. The Council of Lateran having been convoked, Fisher was chosen to be the representative of the University of Cambridge thereat: Erasmus was to have accompanied him to Rome on that occasion, but they had scarcely set forth on their journey, when they were recalled by order of the King.

The bishopric of Rochester becoming vacant, Henry VII. cast his eyes upon Fisher as the future occupant of that ancient see, which had been founded by St. Augustine, the Apostle of England, in the year 604. Pope Julius III. confirmed the King's choice, and in the forty-fifth year of his age, in October 1504, the humble professor of Cambridge became Bishop of Rochester. During thirty years he ruled that diocese with the pastoral staff of the good shepherd, who was ever ready to give his life for his flock; his episcopate was one unbroken act of pastoral zeal; his love for the poor was his most marked characteristic. He had fixed days for visiting the hospitals and prisons of his diocese; and on such occasions he distributed abundant alms, and addressed the unfortunate inmates in words of tender consola-

tion and instruction. He also frequently visited the poor in their homes, especially in their times of sickness or domestic trouble. All looked up to him as to a father to help them in their distress, and to counsel and guide them in their perplexities. In his own house he exercised a generous hospitality; men of letters from every country found a welcome under his roof. Erasmus was his frequent guest. Young men of limited means who aimed at literary progress, especially poor students of Cambridge, found in him always a generous patron and friend. He was ever ready to take part in works of public utility, and he bore the chief expense in the construction of a bridge at Rochester. But these external occupations did not in any way interfere with the full discharge of his duties as a Bishop. He loved his diocese as the mystic bride to which God had wedded him, and from which he resolved never in life to be willingly separated. Richer sees were offered to him, but he constantly refused to accept them, playfully saying, 'I am not willing to be divorced from my present wife, who hath no fault but her poverty.' He loved to dwell in the midst of his people in Rochester, and dreaded the precincts of the court, complaining bitterly whenever he was called away to take part in some court ceremony, from which he could not absent himself without giving offence to those in high places. He was not insensible of the dangers which were then threatening England's Catholicity. The great edifice which had stood for well-nigh a thousand years was, alas, becoming rotten in its foundations. Its Bishops were courtiers and not the true shepherds of their flocks; hence their fall *en masse* when the storm of apostasy rose and the floodgates

were opened. With prophet-like boldness Fisher, in Convocation, addressed himself to his peers: 'My Lords,' said he, 'what have we to do with the courts of Kings? If we are in love with majesty, is there a greater excellence than that God whom we serve? If we are in love with stately buildings, are there higher roofs than our cathedrals? If with apparel, is there a greater ornament than that of our priesthood? or is there better company than communion with the Saints? I think it is necessary that we who are the heads should give example to the inferior clergy, that we may be all better conformable to the image of God.' This holy prelate, in his own house, gave the example of every episcopal and Christian virtue; he led a life of continual prayer and self-denial; he was always watchful over the interests of souls; but the most striking trait in his beautiful character was his indomitable courage in defending the rights of justice and truth. An opportunity was to be given him of displaying this noble virtue before the eyes of all the world.

In the early period of his reign, Henry VIII. looked up to Fisher as a father. The Countess of Richmond, the King's grandmother, had on her deathbed recommended the youthful monarch to the special spiritual care of the holy prelate. Henry used to boast that no monarch in Christendom could vaunt himself on having in his dominions a prelate more learned, wise, and holy than the Bishop of Rochester.

Twenty years of the married life of Henry had now elapsed. Nothing had occurred to disturb the harmony of his relations with his chaste and holy wife Katherine, until in an evil hour the eye of the

monarch fell upon Anne Boleyn, one of the Queen's maids of honour. The sequel is well known, and needs no repetition here, further than what is required to illustrate the noble traits of character disclosed on the part of the venerable Bishop of Rochester, amidst the sad and terrible events of that period. Henry was bent on legalising, before the Church and the world, his adulterous intercourse with Anne Boleyn. Katherine was to be despoiled of her title of wife and queen; and in her stead Anne was to be raised to the throne and acclaimed as Queen of England. This iniquity was resisted at Rome ; but, alas, all the Bishops of England, with one glorious exception, seconded the designs of Henry. Threats and bribes and promises had been freely and successfully employed by that tyrant prince, in gaining over to the side of his guilty designs against the rights of the best of queens and the purest of wives, not only the vast majority of the commons and nobles and judges, but also the whole episcopal body of England, with the exception of Fisher, Bishop of Rochester. This holy and courageous prelate openly and generously espoused the cause of the wronged and injured Katherine, having a consciousness, from what he knew of the passions of Henry, that thereby he was exposing himself to the forfeiture, not only of liberty, but also of life.

On the 18th June 1529, Fisher appeared as the advocate of Katherine in the great hall of the palace of Black Friars. The King and Queen were present. The court was presided over by Wolsey and Campeggio, the Cardinal-legates. When Katherine Queen of England was cited: she made the circuit of the court to the place where the King sat, and kneeling

before him, said in broken English: 'Sir, I beseech you, for all the love there hath been between us, and for the love of God, let me have some right and justice; take of me some pity and compassion, for I am a poor stranger, born out of your dominions. I have here no unprejudiced counsellor, and I flee to you as to the head of justice within your realm. Alas, alas, wherein have I offended you? I take God and all the world to witness that I have been to you a true, humble, and obedient wife, ever conformable to your will and pleasure. I loved all those you loved only for your sake, whether they were my friends or mine enemies. These twenty years have I been your true wife, and by me ye have had divers children, although it has pleased God to call them out of this world, which has been no fault of mine. I put it to your conscience, whether I came not to you a maid. If you have since found any dishonour in my conduct, then I am content to depart, albeit to my great shame and disparagement. But if none there be, then I beseech you thus lowlily to let me remain in my proper state. Most humbly do I require of you, in the way of charity and for the love of God, who is the just Judge of all, to spare me the sentence of this new court. If ye will not extend to me this favour, your pleasure be fulfilled, and to God do I commit my cause.' With that, making a low obeisance to the King, she departed from the court, leaving behind her many sad hearts and weeping eyes.

Henry, perceiving the impression produced by the pathetic appeal of Katherine, commenced one of his hypocritical orations, in which he said: 'Forasmuch as the Queen is now gone, I will declare in her absence before you all, that she has ever been to me as

true, obedient, and conformable a wife, as I could wish or any man desire to have, having all the virtuous qualities that ought to be in a woman of her dignity; so that if I sought all Europe over I should never find a better wife. But conscience, conscience is such a thing! Who can endure the sting and prick of conscience? Therefore, my Lords, I thought good, for the relieving of my conscience, to know by your good and learned counsel whether I might lawfully take another wife, by whom God may send me issue male.'

No Bishop present but one dared to oppose the designs of the King. The noble Fisher boldly, under the frown of royalty, pleaded the cause of Katherine, and stood up against the proposal of Henry. The King, darting an angry look on the intrepid prelate, exclaimed: 'Well, well, my lord of Rochester, it makes no great matter; we will not stand with you in argument. You are but one amongst the rest, if the worst fall out.' A judgment was soon to fall on the episcopal body of England, for abandoning thus collectively the cause of outraged justice and innocence, in order to please a wicked king; its candlestick was to be removed from its place; its Catholicity was to depart from it.

Henry's hopes of obtaining the consent of the Holy See to a divorce from Katherine, and to his marriage with Anne Boleyn, having entirely failed, he abandoned himself to a violent hatred of Rome, and vowed vengeance against Clement, who had refused to grant the dispensation, and had further declared his marriage with Katherine true and valid. It was then that the idea of aspiring to become himself the head of the Church, in all things spiritual as

well as temporal, took shape in his mind. We will allow Hall to relate how the King was led to form and entertain a project so extraordinary.

'The King being at that time at a place called St. Osyth, near Colchester, this passage happened: Mr. Cranmer, a Master of Arts and Fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge, being at the same time retired into that country with one of his pupils, when hearing some of the attendants of the King declaring how discontentedly he behaved himself, insomuch that he would hardly suffer any man to come near him, said, "Gentlemen, if the King knew but his own power, there would be no cause left for discontentment, but rather a way paved for all manner of satisfaction. For if the King rightly understood his own office, neither Pope nor any potentate whatsoever, neither in causes civil or ecclesiastical, hath anything to do with him or any of his actions within his own realm and dominion; but he himself, under God, hath supreme government in this land in all causes whatsoever. And this I am able to make good against any man living." One of the courtiers hearing this, and knowing it to be a speech agreeable to the King's temper, said unto Cranmer, "I tell thee, scholar, the King shall not sleep until I have told him what thou hast said; and if thou canst make true thy words, for aught I know in time thou mayst be a Bishop." Whereupon he hastens to the court to speak with the King. It was late in the evening before he could find his opportunity, but at last he found it; and when he related to the King what such a man had said, and what he would undertake, the King swore by his wonted oath, "Mother of God, that man hath the right sow by the ear. I shall not go to bed till

I speak to him;" commanding the same party to bring Cranmer to him with all speed.'

The daring and sacrilegious project of declaring himself head of the Church had now fully entered the mind of Henry. In his supremacy he saw an easy road to become possessed of all the goods of the Church, and to grant to himself what dispensations he liked for the indulgence of his passions. He resolved to demand at once of the Bishops, to acknowledge him as the head of the Church in England. Convocation was assembled by his orders to discuss, as he declared, a matter of great importance. When the Bishops were assembled, the object for which he had called them together was made known to them; namely, that they should acknowledge him to be the supreme head of the Church. This amazing proposal was introduced on the part of the King by Sir Thomas Audley, of infamous memory, with a mixture of royal threats and promises. The Bishops were panic-stricken. For a while all remained silent. At last Fisher rose, and addressed the assembled Convocation in these bold and noble words:

'My Lords, it is true we are under the King's lash, and stand in need of the King's good favour and clemency. Yet this argues not that we should therefore do that which will render us both ridiculous and contemptible to all the Christian world, and hissed out of the society of God's Holy Catholic Church. For what good will that be to us, to keep the possession of our houses and cloisters and convents, and to lose the society of the Christian world, to preserve our goods and to lose our consciences? Wherefore, my Lords, I pray let us consider what we do, and what it is we are to grant, or whether it lieth in our

power to grant what the King requireth at our hands, or whether the King be an apt person to receive this; that so we may go wisely to work, and not like men who had lost all honesty and wit together with their worldly fortune. What is the supremacy of the Church which we are to give unto the King? It is to exercise the supremacy of the Church in chief, which, according to all that ever I have learned, both in the Gospel and through the whole course of divinity, mainly consists in these points: Firstly, in loosing and binding sinners according to that which our Saviour said unto St. Peter when He ordained him head of His Church, *To thee I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven.* Now, my Lords, can we say unto the King, To thee I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven? If you say, Aye, where is your warrant? If you say, No, then you have answered yourselves that you cannot put such keys into his hands. Secondly, the supreme government of the Church consists in feeding Christ's sheep and lambs according to our Saviour's promise unto Peter, of making him His universal shepherd. Christ gave to Peter unlimited jurisdiction when He said, *Feed My lambs;* and not only so, but feed those who are the feeders of My lambs—*feed My sheep.* Now, my Lords, can any of us say to the King, *Pasce oves*—Feed my lambs, feed my sheep? God has given to His Church some to be apostles, some evangelists, some pastors, some doctors, that they might edify the body of Christ; so that you must make the King one of these, before you can set him one over these. And when you have made him one of these supreme heads of the Church, he must be such a head as may be answerable to all the members of Christ's body. It is not the

few ministers of an island that must constitute a head over the universe; or at least, by such example, we must allow as many heads over the Church as there are sovereign powers in Christ's dominions. What then will become of the supremacy? *Attendite vobis: Take heed to yourselves, and to the whole flock wherein the Holy Ghost hath placed you Bishops to rule the Church of God*, was not said to Kings but to Bishops. We cannot grant this unto the King, without renouncing our unity with the See of Rome. In doing this, we should forsake the first four General Councils. We should thereby renounce all canonical and ecclesiastical laws of the Church of Christ. We renounce thereby the unity of the Christian world; and we so leap out of Peter's ship to be drowned in the waves of all heresies, sects, schisms, and divisions. The first General Council acknowledged the authority of Silvester, Bishop of Rome, by sending their decrees to be ratified by him. The Council of Constantinople did acknowledge Pope Damasus to be their chief, by admitting him to give sentence against the heretics Macedonius and Sabellius. The Council of Ephesus admitted Pope Celestine to be their chief judge, by admitting his condemnation on the heretic Nestorius. The Council of Chalcedon admitted Pope Leo to be their chief head; and all General Councils of the world admitted the Pope of Rome only to be the supreme head of the Church. And now shall we acknowledge another head? or one head to be in England, and another in Rome? By this argument Herod must have been the head of the Church of the Jews; Nero must have been the head of the Church of Christ. The King's majesty is not susceptible of this donation. Ozias, for meddling with the priest's office,

was thrust out of the Temple, and smitten with leprosy. King David, when bringing home the ark of God, did he so much as touch the ark or execute the least priestly function? All good Christian emperors have ever refused ecclesiastical authority. For at the first General Council of Nice, certain bills were previously brought unto Constantine to be confirmed by his authority; but he ordered them to be burnt, saying, "God hath ordained you priests, and given you power to judge over us." Valentine, the good emperor, was required by the Bishops to be present with them to reform the heresy of the Arians. He answered: "As I am one of the lay people, it is not lawful for me to define such controversies, but let the priests, to whom God has given charge thereof, assemble when they will in due order." Theodosius, writing to the Council of Ephesus, saith it is not lawful for him that is not of the holy order of Bishops to intermeddle with ecclesiastical matters. And now shall we cause our King to be head of the Church, when all good Kings have abhorred the very least thought thereof, and so many wicked Kings have been plagued for so doing? Truly, my Lords, I think they are his best friends who dissuade him from it; and he would be the worst enemy to himself if he should obtain it. Lastly, if this thing be, farewell to all unity of Christendom. For, as that holy and blessed martyr St. Cyprian saith, all unity depends upon that Holy See as upon the authority of St. Peter's successors; for, saith the same holy father, all heresies, sects, and schisms have no other rise but this, that men will not be obedient to the chief Bishop. And now for us to shake off our communion with that Church, either we must grant the Church of Rome to be the Church of God, or else

a malignant Church. If you answer she is of God, and a Church where Christ is truly taught, and His sacraments rightly administered, how can we forsake, how can we fly from such a Church? Certainly we ought to be with, and not to separate ourselves from, such a one. If we answer that the Church of Rome is not of God, but a malignant Church, then it will follow that we, the inhabitants of this land, have not as yet received the true faith of Christ; seeing that we have not received any other Gospel, any other doctrine, any other sacraments, than what we have received from her, as most evidently appears by all the ecclesiastical histories. Wherefore, if she be a malignant Church, we have been deceived all this while. And if to renounce the common Father of Christendom and all the General Councils, be to forsake the unity of the Christian world, then the granting of the supremacy of the Church unto the King is a renouncing of this unity, a tearing of the seamless coat of Christ in sunder, a dividing of the mystical body of Christ, His spouse, limb from limb, and tail to tail, like Sampson's foxes, to set the field of Christ's Holy Church all on fire. And this it is which we are about. Wherefore let it be said unto you in time, and not too late, Look you to that.'

The words of the holy Bishop produced a profound impression on the whole Convocation. The proposal to vote the supremacy of the King was rejected for that time. But Henry was not to be baffled. He sent his orators to the Convocation House to put its members in mind of the danger they were in, and to acquaint them with the King's heavy displeasure. Henry, finding his threats not producing the desired results, had recourse to smiles and promises. The Bishops were

summoned to meet him in his palace at Westminster. At their first entrance into his presence, he cast upon them a most gracious look, and spoke to them in the softest and most winning words he could use, promising never to abuse his authority, if his supremacy over the Church were admitted. 'Wherefore,' said he, 'having made you this frank promise, I expect that you shall deal with me accordingly.'

At the next assembly of the Bishops, Fisher discussed the promises of the King in these words: 'It is true the King was graciously pleased to protest thus and thus. What if the King should alter his mind? Where is our remedy? What if a woman succeed to the crown? Must she be head of the Church? What if an infant should succeed? Can he be head? This were not only to make the Church no Church, but the Scripture no Scripture, and at last Jesus to be no Christ.'

In the mean time, a law was passed declaring Henry head of the Church. An oath was also framed, embodying his supremacy in all things, spiritual as well as temporal, in his dominions; and also declaring the validity of his marriage with Anne Boleyn. This oath was to be pressed especially on Bishops and persons of distinction. Fisher was summoned to appear at Lambeth before the Commissioners appointed for administering this oath. The Commissioners were Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury; Cromwell, Secretary of State; and Audley, Lord Chancellor. On receiving this summons, the holy Bishop felt that the hour, to which he had been looking forward, of suffering for Jesus Christ, and for the cause of truth and justice, had now come. He had a presentiment of what was going to happen, and felt that his life was aimed

at. Before starting on his journey, he made his will, and left legacies to several charities. On his departure, a great crowd, representing all classes in his beloved city of Rochester, followed him weeping, and accompanied him for some miles. They felt that they would never again see their holy Bishop and father. When he arrived at Lambeth, he and Sir Thomas More, who had also been summoned to take the oath, met one another at the entrance to the Archbishop's palace. Sir Thomas accosted the Bishop thus: 'Well met, my Lord; I hope we shall meet in heaven.' To which the Bishop replied: 'This should be the way, Sir Thomas, for it is a very strait gate we are in.' When he appeared before the Commission, he was asked, in the name of the King, to subscribe to the oath. He read over attentively the form of the oath, and then asked to be granted some days for its more careful perusal. Five days were allowed to him. This delay having expired, he appeared again before the Commissioners. He then said that if he were allowed to modify the form of the oath on certain points, he might be able to subscribe to it with security to his conscience, and thus meet the wishes of the King. The Commissioners answered that the King would not permit any modification, and that the oath should be subscribed to as it stood. Then Cranmer said to him in a stern voice, 'My Lord of Rochester, you must answer directly, whether you will or will not subscribe to the oath.' Upon which the Bishop replied firmly, 'If you will needs have me answer directly, my answer is, that, forasmuch as my conscience cannot be satisfied, I absolutely refuse the oath.' As a consequence of this refusal, the holy Bishop was committed prisoner to the Tower on the

26th of April 1534. Henry still hoped, however, to conquer his resistance. By his orders several members of the Privy Council visited the aged prelate in his dungeon, for the purpose of persuading him to take the obnoxious oath, and thus recover the King's friendship. To their solicitations he made reply: 'My very good friends, and some of you my old acquaintances, I know you wish me no hurt, but a great deal of good. I do believe that, on the terms you speak of, I might have the King's favour as much as ever. Wherefore, if you can answer me one question, I will perform all your desires.' 'What is that, my lord?' said one and all of them. 'It is this,' answered the Bishop: 'what will it gain a man to win the whole world and to lose his own soul?'

On another occasion, a large number of Bishops were sent by Henry to visit Fisher in prison, for the purpose of shaking his constancy, and inducing him to conform to the views and wishes of the King on the subject of his divorce from Katherine. Fisher was deeply grieved on beholding members of his own order thus openly espousing the cause of injustice, and acting as the mere creatures of Henry's unlawful designs. In sad and solemn tones, he replied to their unworthy manœuvres: 'My Lords, it doth wound me grievously that I should be so urged by you, whom this business concerns as much as it does me. Alas, I do but defend your cause, whilst you so plead against yourselves. It would better become us all to stick together, in repressing the violences and injuries which daily are obtruded on our Holy Mother the Catholic Church, whom we have all in common, than thus divided among yourselves to help on the mischief. But I see judgment is begun at the house of God; and

I see no hope, if we fall, that the rest will stand. You see we are betrayed on every side, and that the citadel is betrayed by those who should defend it. Since we have made no better resistance, we are not the men that shall see an end of these calamities. Wherefore, I pray, leave me to Almighty God, in whom only there is comfort, which no man can deprive me of. And for that you have so often told me of the King's heavy displeasure against me, I pray remember my duty to his grace. Tell him I had rather exercise the duty I owe unto his grace in praying for him, than in pleasing him in this kind.' Such solemn touching words should have opened the eyes, and reached the hearts of these time-serving prelates. Alas, they had implicated themselves too far to retrace their steps. They were unwilling to exchange the smiles of the King and their palatial homes for the monarch's high displeasure and a dungeon in the Tower, as fellow-captives of the noble Fisher. Some of those Bishops became afterwards the fiercest abettors of that persecution, which was about to burst over the heads of the faithful Catholics of the kingdom.

During the early part of the good Bishop's imprisonment, he was treated with some degree of consideration; this was continued so long as the hope remained of winning him by promises and flattery to the King's unholy projects. In this period he was able to hold communication by letter with his illustrious fellow-confessor, Sir Thomas More, who had also been cast into the Tower for the same cause as Fisher. Great was the consolation which these holy prisoners for the faith derived from their mutual exhortations to one another to persevere to the end in the good cause, and, if it should be God's will, to die joyfully for justice

and truth. But this correspondence was discovered and stopped. It now became evident that the resolute spirit of Fisher was proof against the seductions employed to draw him to Henry's side. It was accordingly resolved to increase the rigour of his prison discipline, and thus to subdue by severity his noble constancy. For fourteen months this venerable man, now approaching his eightieth year, was left to pine in a damp dungeon; his clothes were allowed to fall into a state of rags and filth; his supply of food was coarse and insufficient; the winter wind played through his prison bars on his ill-clad and wasted body; he was deprived of books, and was denied the consolation of receiving the sacraments; nor was his confessor allowed free access to him. In this dire extremity, the aged Bishop wrote to Secretary Cromwell the following most touching letter, the original of which is still in existence, and I have had the happiness of holding it in my hands: 'Furthermore, I beseech you to be good master unto me in my necessity, for I have neither shirt, nor suit, nor yet other clothes that are necessary for me to wear, but that be ragged and rent to shamefully. Notwithstanding I might easily suffer that, if they would keep my body warm. But my diet also, God knoweth how slender it is at many times. And now in mine age my stomach may not away but with a few kind of meats, which if I want, I decay forthwith, and fall into coughs and diseases of my body, and cannot keep myself in health. And, as our Lord knoweth, I have nothing left unto me for to provide any better, but as my brother of his own purse layeth out for me, to his great hinderance. Wherefore, good master secretary, soon I beseech you to have some pity upon me, and let me have such

things as are necessary for me in mine age, and specially for my health. And also that it may please you, by your high wisdom, to move the King's highness to take me unto his gracious favour again, and to restore me unto my liberty out of this cold and painful imprisonment; whereby ye shall bind me to be your poor beadsman for ever unto Almighty God, who ever have you in His protection and custody. Other two things I must also desire upon you: that one is, that it may please you that I may take some priest within the Tower, by the assignment of Master Lieutenant, to hear my confession against this holy time; that other is, that I may borrow some books to stir my devotion more effectually these holy days, for the comfort of my soul. This I beseech you to grant me of your charity. And thus our Lord send you a merry Christmas and a comfortable to your heart's desire. At the Tower, the 22d day of December.'

But the severity of his treatment served only to brighten the spirit, and exalt the courage of this holy confessor. Recourse was now had to stratagem to induce him to submit. It was known that he entertained great friendship and a high esteem for his fellow-prisoner Sir Thomas More. By the express order of the King, a false report of More's taking the oath of supremacy was communicated to Fisher, with the view of inducing him to do likewise. The good Bishop was grieved when the false news of More's fall reached him; he expressed himself surprised at Sir Thomas's want of resolution: 'But perhaps,' he said, 'he was induced to do it through a natural tenderness and affection for his numerous and starving family. But what excuse can I have, who fall alone, —who am a minister of the Gospel, and am particu-

larly obliged by my character to give good example to others?'

It was now made manifest that Fisher could not be induced to act against his conscience, either by fraud, flattery, or coercion. His firmness excited to the utmost the wrath of the court, and it was resolved to bring him as soon as possible to trial for high treason, and thus hasten on his end. Difficulty was, however, found in discovering evidence of his formal denial of the King's ecclesiastical supremacy; for he had been very cautious in speaking on the subject. A snare was accordingly laid to draw from him such a denial as would constitute high treason. Richard Rich, the Solicitor-General, went to visit him, under pretence of coming on the part of the King himself. His commission, apparently, was to acquaint the Bishop that of late his Majesty had conceived some doubts concerning the new oath he had imposed upon his people, and that he wished to be enlightened on the matter by Fisher, whom he regarded as the most capable person in Europe to set him right; he therefore desired him to be frank and explicit on the subject, and assured him that no advantage would be taken of any declaration he should make. The good Bishop, suspecting no fraud, told Rich very freely that it was not only his own opinion, but the received doctrine of the universal Church, that the substance of the oath was contrary to the law of God, and that he was willing to make it appear so, when the occasion offered. This stratagem of Rich's sealed the Bishop's fate: Henry learnt with gratification, from the Solicitor's own lips, with what success Fisher had been entrapped; no further delay was allowed in bringing him up for trial. On the 17th of June 1535, he was conducted from the

Tower to the King's Bench, Westminster. It was a melancholy sight, to see this aged and venerable prelate led through the streets of London as a public criminal. He reached Westminster by slow and painful stages, exciting compassion in beholders as he walked along with tottering steps. Having entered the great hall, he was called to hold up his hand as a common malefactor. His indictment was then read, the substance of which was, that he maliciously had used the following words: 'The King our Sovereign Lord is not the supreme head of the Church of England.' The only witness produced by the Crown was Rich, the Solicitor-General. With amazement the holy Bishop beheld Rich coming forward as a witness against him. 'Mr. Rich,' he said, 'I marvel to hear you come and bear witness against me of those words. My Lords, this man came to me on a secret message which he brought me from the King, wherein his grace desired to know my full opinion on the matter. But I put him in mind of the new Act of Parliament, which might endanger me much, should I speak anything against its provisions. Whereon he assured me that, upon his honour and on the word of a king, nothing I should say unto this his messenger should be deemed against the statute, seeing it was but a declaration of my mind unto his own person; and the messenger added a solemn promise that it would be repeated to no living soul, but only to the King.' Rich did not contradict this statement; he merely said he had done no more than what his Majesty had commanded him. Audley ruled against the Bishop's plea, declaring at the same time that in so speaking against the King's supremacy—yea, though at the King's own command—he had committed treason,

and that nothing could save him from death but the King's pardon. The jury knew what verdict they were expected to give: each one felt his own life was in peril, should he venture to disregard the will of the Crown in this matter. The venerable Bishop was declared by them guilty of high treason, and sentence of death was recorded against him on the spot. When the sentence was pronounced, he asked permission to say a few words, which was granted to him. He then spoke in these terms: 'My Lords, you have condemned me to die for the crime of high treason, because I was not willing to acknowledge the King to be the head of the Church of England. Now that I am condemned by your sentence, I resign myself fully into the hands of God, to suffer all that, in His holy will, He may decree in my regard. To Him I abandon myself without reserve. I will now freely declare to you what I think of the royal supremacy. I am convinced now, as I always have been, and I repeat it here for the last time, that his Majesty has no right whatsoever to exercise that supremacy over the Church, which he claims for himself. I have never heard that any earthly prince possessed such a right. If the King continues to follow this path, the anger of God will overtake him, and he will bring a scourge upon his own soul and upon the souls of many in his kingdom. I earnestly beg of God to grant to his Majesty the grace of retracing his steps whilst yet there is time, and of listening to wise counsels for the profit of his own soul and the good of Christendom.' Having said these words he surrendered himself to the armed escort, who were in readiness to convey him back to the Tower.

The sentence of death which had just been pronounced upon him, seemed to communicate a new life to the holy Bishop. Erasmus thus describes the venerable confessor's appearance, when he came forth from the great hall of Westminster: 'One would think that he was returning from some festive scene. His countenance was radiant with joy; his step was light and steady; his whole manner bespoke an interior gaiety of heart. One could see that the holy Bishop now felt that his soul was nigh to that harbour of eternal rest, after which he had so long yearned.' When he reached the gates of the Tower, turning to his escort, he thanked them with a gracious smile for their services. He expressed regret that poverty prevented him testifying his gratitude by some suitable gift, but added that he would not fail to offer his prayers on their behalf.

As soon as Henry learnt that Fisher was sentenced to death, he despatched at once to Rochester some of his emissaries, headed by one Moryson, to seize on the Bishop's effects in the name of the Crown. Fisher's great charities and his munificent gifts to the University of Cambridge left him in possession of very few valuable objects at the time of his imprisonment—Moryson was disappointed in finding the episcopal palace so bare of treasures. But at last he made a discovery, which filled him with the hope of laying his hands on some objects of great value to take back to the King. In a hidden corner he found a great chest, strongly bound with iron clasps, and carefully locked and sealed. He concluded at once that it contained some rich deposit, and called around him his companions to witness the procedure of opening the mysterious chest. At last the lid was raised, and the

precious contents disclosed. They consisted of an old hair shirt and other instruments of corporal penance, wherewith the holy Bishop had been in the habit of chastising his body to bring it into subjection, after the example of St. Paul. This incident, whilst it filled the rapacious emissaries of Henry with confusion, brought to light the heroic austerities which Fisher had been in the habit of practising in his private life.

A clause was, by Henry's wishes, inserted in the Bishop's sentence, by which the right of naming a day for his execution was reserved to the King. This was probably done in the hope that Fisher's courage would at last break down, and that he would consent to petition for life. But an event happened about this time, which had the effect of hastening forward the execution of the holy confessor: Paul III. had just named him Cardinal. When Henry heard of this nomination, he was much enraged, and exclaimed: 'The Pope may send him a hat; but he will have to wear it on his shoulders, for I will not leave him a head on which to wear it.' Late in the evening of the 21st of June, a messenger arrived at the Tower, bearing Henry's orders for the execution of Fisher on the following morning. The Bishop had already retired to rest, and the Lieutenant of the Tower, through a motive of compassion, did not wish to disturb the sleep of the aged prelate, by communicating this intelligence to him at so advanced an hour. Next day, at five o'clock, he came to Fisher's chamber, and found him asleep in bed; awakening him, he told him that he was the bearer to him of a message from the King, that he had to suffer that forenoon. 'Well,' said the Bishop, 'if this be your errand, you bring me no great

news, for I have looked forward a long time for this message. I most humbly thank his Majesty, that it hath pleased him to rid me of this worldly business.' He then inquired what hour was appointed for his execution, and was told ten o'clock that same morning. Hearing this, he said: 'Then, good Lieutenant, let me by your patience sleep an hour or two, for I have slept very, very ill this night; not for any fear I have of death, I thank God, but by reason of my great infirmity and weakness.' 'The King's pleasure is further,' said the Lieutenant, 'that you should use as little speech as may be, especially of anything touching his Majesty, whereby the people may have any cause to think of him or his proceedings otherwise than well.' 'For that,' replied the Bishop, 'you shall see me order myself as, by God's grace, neither the King nor any man else shall have occasion to mislike my words.' The Lieutenant then departed, and the holy prisoner slept calmly for two hours. He awoke refreshed, and then called his man to help him to rise, but first commanded him to remove from him the hair shirt which he constantly wore, and to convey it privily out of the house. He then ordered a shirt of the whitest linen to be prepared, and his best apparel to be cleanly brushed and laid out for him. His servant, who had never witnessed before, on the part of the holy Bishop, such care about his dress and person, ventured to ask his Lordship what this sudden change might mean, and why he was so particular that morning, when he had only a few hours to live, about the comeliness of his apparel. The Bishop replied: 'Dost thou not know that this is our marriage-day, and that it behoveth us to employ all comeliness and care for the solemnity thereof?' About

nine o'clock the Lieutenant came again, and, finding him almost ready, announced that he was now come for him. Fisher, then turning to his man, said: 'Reach me my furred tippet to put about my neck.' 'O my Lord,' interposed the Lieutenant, 'what need you be so careful about your health for this little time, being, as your Lordship knoweth, not much above an hour?' 'I think no otherwise,' replied the Bishop; 'but yet in the mean time I will keep myself as well as I can; for I tell you the truth, though I have, thank our Lord, a very good desire and a willing mind to die at this present, and so trust in His infinite mercy and goodness that He will continue it, yet I will not willingly hinder my health one minute of an hour, but still prolong the same as long as I can by such reasonable ways and means as Almighty God hath provided for me.' The holy Bishop then made the sign of the cross on his forehead, and taking up a little book in his hand, which was the New Testament, went out of the prison door. Being so weak from age and infirmity, he was scarcely able to go down the stairs. When he reached the stair-foot, he was taken up in a chair between two of the Lieutenant's men, and carried in the midst of a great number of armed soldiers to the Tower-gate, to be given over to the Sheriff of London for execution. When the cortége arrived at the precincts of the Liberties of the Tower, a halt was made for some moments, whilst arrangements were being concluded with the sheriff for the delivery into his hands of the august prisoner. During that interval the Bishop rose from his chair, and, leaning for support against the wall, lifted his eyes towards heaven, and said: 'O Lord, this is the last time I shall

ever open this book; let some comfortable text now chance unto me, whereby Thy poor servant may glorify Thee in this my last hour.' Thus saying he opened the New Testament, and the following words were the first on which his eyes fell: *I have glorified Thee on earth. I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do. Now glorify Thou me, O Father, with Thyself* (St. John xvii. 4). Having read so far he closed the book, saying, 'Here is learning enough for me to my life's end.' Thus speaking, he sank exhausted into his chair, and was carried by the sheriff's men to the scaffold on Tower Hill. The holy confessor never ceased all along the way praying and devoutly meditating on the words he had just read. When he reached the foot of the scaffold, a new courage glowed within his aged breast. He felt the moment was now at hand, when he should lay down his life for the love of Jesus Christ, and in defence of Catholic truth. When he was on the point of going up the steps, he seemed to receive a supernatural strength for the occasion; his habitual feebleness left him; he refused the aid which was offered him, and casting from him the walking-staff on which he had been leaning for support, he exclaimed in playful tones, 'Now, my poor feet, shift for yourselves; render me this last service; step forward manfully to the goal.' With the quickness of a young man he ascended the flight of steps leading to the platform of the scaffold. When he had reached it, the south-eastern sun shed a sudden ray of vivid light on his brow. His tall and slender figure, bowed with age, seemed at that moment as if encircled with a heavenly halo. The holy prelate, gazing upon the bright sunlight playing around his scaffold, exclaimed: *Come*

ye to Him, and be enlightened, and your faces shall not be confounded.

By this time it was ten o'clock. The executioner, being then ready to do his work, knelt down before him to ask his forgiveness. 'I forgive thee,' said the Bishop, 'with all my heart, and I trust thou shalt see me overcome this storm courageously.' Then his gown and tippet were taken from him, and he stood in his doublet and hose in the sight of the vast multitude which had assembled on Tower Hill. Turning to the crowd, the holy martyr spoke these words: 'Christian people, I come hither to die for Christ's Holy Catholic Church, and I thank God that yet I have not feared death. Wherefore I desire you to help me by your prayers, that in the very point and instant of death's stroke I may stand steadfast, without failing on any point of Catholic faith. I beseech Almighty God, of His infinite goodness, to save the King and this realm, that it may please Him to hold His holy hand over it, and to send the King good counsel.' These words he spoke with such a cheerful countenance, and with such constancy and courage, that it appeared evident to all that he was not only void of fear, but also glad to die. He knelt on both knees and said certain prayers, among which were the *Te Deum* and the psalm *In te Domine speravi.* The executioner then came and bound his hands, and put a kerchief before his eyes. The lips of the holy martyr continued still to move in earnest supplication to God. His prayer being ended, he calmly laid his head over the middle of a little block, and the executioner with one blow cut his slender neck asunder.

His venerable body lay exposed upon the scaffold

till eight o'clock that evening, when two watchmen carried it on their halberts to Allhallows Barking churchyard, in Tower-street, where it was thrown naked into a hole, without a coffin, or shroud, or any ceremony. His head was raised on a pole on London Bridge, where it was exposed during the octave of St. John the Baptist, his patron saint. At that same time Henry was celebrating his birthday with Anne Boleyn at Westminster. St. John Baptist lost his head on Herod's birthday, for opposing the evil passions of that tyrant King; and on the birthday of Henry the head of Fisher was raised on London Bridge. Fisher suffered martyrdom on the 22d of June, the feast of St. Alban, the protomartyr of England. His name does not yet appear in the list of England's canonised saints; but we rejoice in the expectation that he and other blessed martyrs of his period, who died for the same cause as he did, will soon receive in our churches the public veneration due to such heroic confessors of the faith.

The head of the martyr remained exposed for several days on London Bridge; crowds came daily to venerate the holy relic; some declared they saw rays of light issuing from it at frequent intervals. The populace, who had been misled at first by false reports against the good Bishop, spread by Henry's agents, now began to see things in their true light, and to express themselves loudly in his favour, and openly to condemn the King's proceedings. A tumult was dreaded, and the head was removed to quell the excitement.

The news of Fisher's death caused a thrill of horror through Europe. Charles V., on hearing of it, sent for the English ambassador, Sir Thomas Eliot, to ask

him if it were true that the King of England had put the Bishop of Rochester to death. On finding the report confirmed by the ambassador, Charles said, with grief and indignation depicted on his countenance: 'The King, your master, had not the like to that Bishop in his realm; so that, in killing that Bishop, he hath killed all the Bishops of England at one blow.'

Cardinal Pole thus extols the merits of the holy prelate in a work addressed to Henry VIII.: 'If an ambassador had to be sent from earth to heaven, there could not, among all the Bishops and clergy, so fit a man be chosen as he; for what other man have we presently, or many years past had, comparable with him in sanctity, learning, wisdom, and careful diligence in the office and duty of a Bishop?' Paul III., on hearing of the martyrdom of Fisher, addressed a letter to all the princes of Christendom, in which he denounces with grief and indignation the crime of Henry, in causing the death of so holy and learned a Bishop. In this letter he also declares that he had named the holy Bishop Cardinal, in view of his eminent merits, hoping by investing him with this sacred office to shield him from the fury of Henry. His Holiness on this occasion points out many traits of resemblance between Fisher and St. Thomas of Canterbury. He hesitates not to place the virtues and merits of the holy Bishop of Rochester on a level with those of that blessed martyr. We cannot sum up the life and death of this holy prelate in words more fitting than the following, which we borrow from Hall: 'Thus much may I say, that unto Justus, his predecessor, the first Bishop of Rochester, he was a just and true successor. The place of his birth he

doth greatly beautify with the glorious Bishop St. John of Beverley. To the county of Kent, where he was Bishop, he is an ornament with St. Thomas of Canterbury. In the gravity of his writings he is to be reverenced with St. Bede. For stoutly defending the rights and liberties of holy Church against the power of princes, he is not inferior to the blessed Bishops St. Ambrose and St. Chrysostom. In praying for his enemies and persecutors he resembleth holy Stephen. In the courage and constancy of his martyrdom he was a second Cyprian; and in the manner of his death a St. John the Baptist.'

II. SIR THOMAS MORE.

The venerable pontiff's blood was scarcely dry on Tower Hill, when Sir Thomas More, Fisher's fellow-prisoner, suffered the same death on the same spot, and for a like refusal to acknowledge the ecclesiastical supremacy of Henry VIII. The history of Sir Thomas More's early and domestic life has a special value, inasmuch as it gives us a fair glimpse of the private life of good Catholics in his day. It is generally, and I need not say wrongly, supposed by many outside of the Catholic Church, that before the time of the Reformation, as it is called, ignorance, superstition, and vice were universally prevalent in this country. The life of Sir Thomas More, by itself, is a clear refutation of this charge; we cannot study it without being struck by the influence which, in those pre-Reformation days, religion exercised over English homes, sanctifying every detail of family life. In fact religiousness, such as it is in England at the present day, is but the residuum of that grand old Christianity which prevailed in this country before the so-called Reformation. It is like the uncultivated garden of some deserted mansion, where many beautiful flowers still continue to grow amidst the prevailing weeds and ruins.

Thomas More was born in Milk-street in the City of London. His father, Sir John More, was one of the judges of the King's Bench. At an early age he

entered as page the household of Cardinal Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury. This illustrious prelate was a great patron of science and the fine arts. He quickly discovered the brilliant genius of his youthful page, and took measures to have him educated at the University of Oxford. Having completed his university studies with great distinction, More returned to London. From his early days, the growth of piety in his soul kept pace with the growth of knowledge in his mind. Instead of betaking himself to the gaieties of London life, he took up his abode in the guest-house of the Carthusian monastery near Smithfield. For six years he resided in this place, taking part in many of the devotions and austerities of its holy inmates. His bed was a hard bench on the ground, with a log for his pillow; his fastings and vigils were very frequent; his hair shirt was scarcely ever abandoned, even at the time of his highest dignity, and he parted with it only when on the point of martyrdom. He gave it privately to his beloved daughter Margaret, a few days before his execution. His corporal austerities form a circumstance in More's life, which his Protestant biographers have been unable to understand. They seem to forget that such practices are coeval with Christianity; they are the natural consequence of the example and teaching of our Lord, of St. John the Baptist, and the Apostles. As military exercises prepare the soldier for warfare, so do the exercises of voluntary self-denial train the Christian man to fight victoriously, with the aid of God's grace, against his fiercest and basest passions. But More's personal austerity produced no moroseness nor sourness of temper. Never was there a more unselfish and joyous disposition than his. Thus

Hume writes of him: 'The austerity of his virtues and the sanctity of his manners had nowise encroached on the gentleness of his temper, nor ever diminished that frolic and gaiety to which he was naturally inclined. He sported with all the varieties of fortune into which he was thrown, and neither the pride naturally attending a high station, nor the melancholy incident to poverty and retreat, could ever lay hold of his serene and equal spirit.'

His eloquence, his learning, and sterling worth of character opened a ready way for him to the honours and emoluments of public life. We find him named successively Privy Councillor, Speaker of the House of Commons, and finally Lord High Chancellor of England. Before we follow him on his career in the political world, let us visit him in his home at Chelsea. Thus does Erasmus speak of it: 'It is a house in which everybody studies the liberal sciences; where the principal care is virtue and piety; where intemperate language is never heard; where regularity and order are prescribed by the mere force of courtesy; where every one performs his duty, and all are so cheerful, as if mirth were their only employment. Such a house ought rather be called a practical school of the Christian religion.'

So thoroughly did the taste for learning and liberal accomplishments pervade More's whole household, that even if a servant discovered an ear for music, or a talent for any particular accomplishment, it was sure to be encouraged; and for this purpose resources of all kinds were provided—a noble library, a museum of natural history, musical instruments, and astronomical apparatus, with gardens extensively and admirably laid out. While at meals, to prevent

trifling or improper conversation before children and servants, he ordered a domestic to read aloud such books as might prove instructive and interesting. He was an early riser himself, and exacted similar habits from all his family, whom he gathered morning and evening for devotions in common. He allowed no pressure of business to interfere with this duty. On a certain day, a messenger came from the King to see him, when he was at Mass. He would not stir till the conclusion of the service. He said on that occasion, 'Let us serve God first; the King's turn comes next.' Roper says it was his invariable custom, before entering on any business of importance, to confess, hear Mass, and communicate. Every Friday he spent a considerable portion of the day in meditating on the Passion of our Lord. He carried the processional cross in the procession of Corpus Christi, and on Sundays and festival days he joined the choir of his parish church in surplice. When he was Lord Chancellor, a certain nobleman visited him, and finding him clad in surplice preparing to take part in chanting Vespers, remarked that the King would not be pleased at hearing that his Lord Chancellor was thus engaged. 'Not so,' replied More with his usual smile; 'the King, your master and mine, will not surely be offended by my serving his Master and mine.' The method he pursued in the education of his children was wise and affectionate. 'Remember,' he would say to them, 'virtue and learning are the meat; play is but the sauce; we must not go to heaven on feather beds. Our Lord went thither by suffering, and the servant may not be in better case than the Master. You now find everything favouring your spiritual progress; but a day may come when all this

will be changed. Be sure, then, to stand fast, and to cling close to God.' His children were so much attached to him, and he to them, that even after their marriage they could not bear to separate themselves from him. His married daughters lived with their families under his roof. His beautiful domestic spirit manifests itself in the following fragment of one of his letters to a friend: 'The greater part of the day is given to other people's business; the remainder must be given to my family at home. I must gossip with my wife, chat with my children, and find something to say to my servants; for all these things I reckon a part of my business, unless I were to become a stranger in my own house.' Though he loved all his children tenderly, there was one to whom he bore a special affection—his beloved daughter Margaret. None of them so resembled himself in gifts of mind and heart as she. His correspondence with her forms one of the tenderest and most refined productions in English literature. It was not, however, as his correspondent that Margaret was to be principally conspicuous, but as his almoner. He purchased a house at Chelsea which he placed under her care, where the sick and indigent were attended by her.

We cannot close this sketch of the private and domestic virtues of More, without making mention of the deeply reverential love which he bore to his aged father. We cannot do better than quote the words of Lord Campbell on this matter: 'There is no circumstance in Sir Thomas More's life which affects our imagination so much, or gives us such a lovely picture of the manners of the times, as his demeanour to his father, who was then ninety years of age, and Judge in the Court of King's Bench. Every day

during Term time, before he began business in his own court, he went into the Court of King's Bench, and, kneeling before his father, asked and received his blessing.'

We have now to pass to other scenes of his eventful life. He who had edified and gladdened the devoted family circle in the most Christian of homes, is soon to become a resplendent light for the whole Catholic world and for all future generations. More and Henry VIII. may be regarded as personifications, each being the type of a system. More personified in himself that old Catholic faith which for many centuries had shone over England, and in the brightness of which she had emerged from the proportions of a petty province overrun by savage hordes to the grandeur of a mighty nation, with a Constitution and a code of laws moulded on the framework of the Catholic Church, filled by the wisdom of her spirit, and partaking of her energy, vitality, and durability. The sun of that old faith went down, by a mysterious judgment of God, suddenly on the land; but all was not to be gloom. Its receding glories became centred in men like Fisher and More, of the noblest generosity and most attractive sanctity, whose memories still live and give light; and that light is, too, the dawn of a returning day of faith for this kingdom, once so Catholic.

Henry, on the contrary, was an apt personification of that new creed, the basis of whose worship was self. Never was the idol of self raised higher than in the person of Henry: other ambitious princes were satisfied with extending their earthly sovereignty over countries and peoples; but he claimed for himself a spiritual sovereignty over all

classes of his subjects, clergy and laity alike. He had himself proclaimed head of the Church of England in all things, spiritual as well as temporal, and he forced a Bill through Parliament, which declared the denial of this pretended supremacy a crime of high treason punishable with death. Henry's first object in this proceeding was to escape from the authority of the Pope, who forbade him to abandon his lawful and most virtuous wife Katherine, to espouse a vile courtesan, Anne Boleyn. Henry aimed also at acquiring dominion over the goods of the Church, for the purpose of replenishing his exchequer, which had been emptied by his criminal prodigality. He looked about for creatures who would become the instruments of his wicked designs. Too many, alas, were ready at hand for his purposes. He sought especially to win over to his side men of worth and influence, and he made overtures of the most tempting sort to More. But here he met a resistance which he had little expected. More was prepared for the coming storm. For two years and a half he had held the office of Lord Chancellor; but, from the beginning, the cares and responsibilities of that exalted station had weighed heavily upon him, and he was anxious to lay down a dignity which he had not sought. On this course he at last resolved, preferring a life of poverty and obscurity, with a safe conscience, to the honours and emoluments attaching to the chancellorship. When More retired into private life, he was a poor man; his happy home at Chelsea had to be broken up, and all his married children, who, with their families, had been living under his roof, left him, with one exception. He could not bring himself to part with his beloved daughter Margaret,

and her husband, William Roper. In his retirement he gave himself up to his literary pursuits and to his devotions; but he had certain forebodings that he would not be allowed to remain long in peace. A special invitation to the so-called marriage festival of Henry with Anne Boleyn was sent to More, which he refused to accept, and this refusal filled up the cup of Anne Boleyn's wrath against him: she resolved to be revenged and to compass his death. A growing presentiment kept urging More to prepare for his fate; he redoubled his devotions and austerities, seeking, too, to fortify the members of his family for the approaching crisis by similar means. He would introduce, as if by accident, into his ordinary conversation allusions to the joys of heaven, to the sufferings of the martyrs, and to the happiness of losing all things, even life itself, for God. He declared that he was ready himself, if God so willed it, joyfully to die in such a cause. A form of oath had been drawn up by Henry's orders, embodying the legality of his marriage with Anne Boleyn, and declaring him to be head of the Church in all things and causes, both temporal and spiritual. More was summoned before Henry's Commissioners to take this false and blasphemous oath. This requirement he met by a plain refusal; and when threatened by the Commissioners with the anger of the King if he persisted in his course, he replied: 'My Lords, these threats are terrors for children, but not for me.' On his return to his home he exhibited signs of extraordinary cheerfulness; he said playfully to his son-in-law, 'Roper, I have given the devil a good fall this day,' meaning that by his refusal to take the oath he had committed himself so fully to the good

cause that he could no longer retire from it. One day, having asked his daughter how the world went on, and what news there was of the new Queen, 'In faith, father,' she replied, 'never was it merrier; there is nothing at court but sporting and dancing.' 'Alas, Meg,' he exclaimed, 'it is ever so with her. It pitieth me to think into what misery that poor soul will come with these dances of hers. She will spurn off our heads like footballs, but it will not be long ere her own head will dance the same dance as ours.'

More was expecting every day to be cast into prison on charge of high treason: at last his anticipations were realised. On the morning of the day on which he was taken, he confessed, heard Mass, and communicated. The summons to appear anew before the King's Commissioners was received by him with joyful composure of mind, yet his heart was full; for he tenderly loved those fond and dear ones, from whom he felt he was going to be separated for ever in this world. He went forth in silence, accompanied only by his son-in-law Roper. For a while he sat in the barge that was conveying him from Chelsea to Westminster silent and thoughtful: a struggle was going on within his breast; his feelings as a father and husband were battling against the loftier dictates of his conscience and his duty as a Christian. Roper, on his side, was absorbed in his own sad thoughts, being deeply afflicted at the sight of the unusual melancholy that sat upon the venerable and beloved face of More. Presently sadness vanished from the brow of the latter, and his countenance was lit up with its wonted smiles. Rising and approaching Roper, he gaily said: 'Son Roper, let us give thanks to God: the field is won;'

manifesting thus the triumph, which God's grace had just gained within his breast over the force of natural affections. When he appeared before the Commissioners, the obnoxious oath was again tendered to him, and on his further refusal to take it, he was committed to the Tower. Here he spent a month without being permitted to see any one. At last his beloved daughter Margaret found means of reaching him. Alas, her natural affection for her father had got somewhat the better of her Christian fortitude; for she fain would persuade him to yield to the wishes of the King. This was a cruel pang to the heart of More; but he soon had the happiness of seeing her relent of her purpose; and she continued to the end to act in a manner befitting the daughter of such a father. There is nothing more beautiful or touching in the English language, than More's conversations with his daughter during his long imprisonment in the Tower. One day, taking her by the hand, he made her kneel at his side: they recited together the Litany and the Penitential Psalms, before commencing their conversation. He then rose, and gazed at her fondly, and sitting down beside her, they mutually poured their souls into one another. He then spoke to her thus, with his usual cheerfulness: 'They that put me here may ween, as I verily believe, that they have done me a high displeasure; but I assure you, my own good daughter, that had it not been for wife and children I would long ere this have chosen a straiter cell'— meaning that he would have embraced the religious state. 'Methinks,' he continued, 'God dealeth with me as with a wanton child, and doth set me on His lap to dandle me.' On another occasion, playfully alluding to her attempts to shake his resolution, he said she was

another Eve whom the serpent was employing as an instrument of temptation ; then assuming a sadder and more earnest tone, 'Daughter Margaret,' he continued, 'many years have I studied this matter, but I cannot hear or see that which will cause me to change my mind. There is no remedy. God hath placed me in this strait, that I must either deadly displease Him, or abide whatever He wills to fall on me. I have not forgotten in this matter the counsels of our Lord, that we should count the cost ere yet we begin to build. Full many a night, Margaret, while my wife slept, have I weighed and counted, ere yet I closed my eyes, what peril might befall me; and I am sure no case came heavier than mine. In thinking on it, daughter, I had oftentimes a right heavy heart; but yet I thank my Lord for all that I never thought to change.' Margaret hinted that possibly a time might come when he would change, and that then it would be all too late. This remark touched him to the quick. 'Too late!' he cried; 'I beseech our Lord that if ever I make such a change, it may be too late indeed. In this world I pray that I may never benefit by such a change; and albeit I know well that for my sins I am well worthy that God should let me slip, yet I cannot but trust His merciful goodness. I will not mistrust His grace; and if it be His gracious mind that I suffer in this cause, I doubt not but that, in His high goodness, He will make it to serve as a release of the pains of purgatory. Mistrust Him, Meg, will not I, even though I should feel me faint. Yea, if I feel any fear, even at the point to overthrow me, yet will I remember how St. Peter began to sink for his want of faith; and then will I, like him, call on Christ for help, and He will set His holy hand on me, and in the

stormy sea will hold me up from drowning. I wot well, Margaret, without my own fault He will not let me be lost. Therefore, my own daughter, trouble not thy mind for anything that can happen to me in this life, for nothing can happen but what God will; and I know and am sure that whatsoever it be, be it ever so bad, it should be indeed the best. And so, my good child, commend me to all my friends; and I pray right heartily that you will all serve God, and be merry and rejoice in Him.'

Various were the devices employed to shake the constancy of More during his imprisonment in the Tower. It was thought that, by seeing others led forth to death for denying the supremacy of Henry, he might be terrified into submission. There were then under sentence of death at the Tower three holy Carthusians—William Exmew, Humphrey Middlemore, and Sebastian Newdegate—who were condemned to die for the same holy cause as that for which More was a prisoner. On the morning of their execution, they were led by design under the window of More's cell. He was conversing with his daughter Margaret at the time. Attracted by the sound of the passing cavalcade, he looked forth, and presently exclaimed, 'Meg, Meg, do you see who is going by?' 'Yes, father,' she replied; 'it is the Carthusians that are being led off to Tyburn.' Fixing his eyes upon those holy martyrs, More envied them their blessed lot. He then said aloud, 'How full of peace their looks! Listen, they are singing the *Te Deum:* well may they sing; they are going to the marriage-feast. O, how God is good to us in this valley of tears! He calls them to Himself. Farewell! farewell!' Over-

come with joyful emotions, he sank into the arms of his daughter.

The day of his trial at last arrived. After fifteen months of imprisonment in the Tower, he was led forth to traverse London on foot from his prison to Westminster. Lord Campbell thus describes that tragic journey: 'On the morning of the trial More was lead on foot, in a coarse woollen gown, through the most frequented streets from the Tower to Westminster Hall. The colour of his hair, which had become gray since he last appeared in public, his face, which, though still cheerful, was pale and emaciated, his bent posture, and his feeble steps, which he was obliged to support with his staff, showed the rigour of his confinement, and excited the sympathy of the people, instead of impressing them, as it was intended, with a dread of the royal authority. When, sordidly dressed, he held up his hand as a criminal in that place where, arrayed in his magisterial robes, and surrounded by crowds who watched his smile, he had been accustomed on his knees to ask his father's blessing before mounting his own tribunal to determine, as sole judge, the most important rights of the highest subjects in the realm, a general feeling of horror and commiseration ran through the spectators. And after the lapse of three centuries, during which statesmen, prelates, and kings have been unjustly brought to trial under the same roof—considering the splendour of his talents, the greatness of his acquirements, and the innocence of his life—we must still regard his murder as the blackest crime that ever has been perpetrated in England under the form of law' (*Lives of the Chancellors of England*). More's trial was a

mockery. The tyrant will of Henry ruled supreme in courts of justice as well as in Parliament. Such, too, was the depth to which the administration of the law had fallen, that no man's life was safe in the hands of the judges and juries of the land, if it were known that Henry wished for his death. More was found guilty of the so-called crime of refusing to acknowledge that Henry VIII. was head of the Church of England, in all things spiritual and temporal. Sentence of death was pronounced on him without delay by the infamous Audley, who presided as judge, and who acted as one of the chief agents in the early work of the Reformation. The venerable martyr was conducted back to the Tower by water; on his arrival at the Tower-wharf, a scene took place which is one of the most touching on record. His beloved daughter Margaret, with her kinsman Dancey, was awaiting him there; she saw by the axe which was borne before, with its edge turned towards him, that her worst fears were realised, and that her father was condemned to death. Unable to restrain herself, she rushed towards him, exclaiming, 'My father! my father!' We shall allow her, in her own words, to describe this scene: 'I forced my way through the crowd, fearless of bills and halberds, and did cast my arms around my father's neck. He cries, "My Meg, bless thee, bless thee! Enough, enough, my child! What! mean ye to weep and break mine heart? Remember that though I die innocent it is not without the will of God, who could have turned my enemies' hearts, if it were best. Therefore possess your soul in patience. Kiss them all for me." So he gave me back to Dancey's arms, the guards about him all weeping;

but I could not thus lose sight of him for ever; so, after a minute's pause, did make a second rush back away from Dancey, and clave to father again and again. They had pity on me, and made pause while I hung upon his neck. This time there were large drops standing on his dear brow, and the big tears were swelling in his eyes. He whispered to me, "Meg, for Christ's sake don't unman me; thou wilt not deny my last request?" I said, "Oh no," and loosened my arms. "God bless you!" he saith with a last kiss. I could not help crying, "My father! my father!" "The chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof," he whispered, and pointed upwards with so passionate a regard, that I looked up expecting to see a beautiful vision.'

Samuel Rogers has written the following lines on this scene:

'And the blushing maid,
Who through the streets as through a desert stray'd,
And when her dear, dear father pass'd along
Would not be held, but, bursting through the throng,
Halberds and bill-axes, kiss'd him o'er and o'er,
Then turn'd and went, then sought him as before,
Believing she should see his face no more.'

The 6th of July, the vigil of the feast of the Translation of St. Thomas of Canterbury, was the day fixed for the execution of More. On the previous day, writing to his daughter with a coal, for pen and ink, as well as his books, had been for many months taken from him, he said, 'To-morrow I long to go to God. It will be St. Thomas's even and the octave of St. Peter; it were a day meet as one well suited for me.' On the morning of the appointed day he was led forth from the Tower. His countenance

was lighted up with its accustomed smile, which grew brighter as he approached the scaffold. The longing desire of his heart, to die for the love of Jesus Christ, was on the point of being accomplished. The executioner seemed afraid to approach him, but More kissed him as a dear friend, and bade him pluck up his courage and fear nothing. He asked the prayers of all around him, and called on all to witness that he died in the faith of the Holy Catholic Church, loyal to his God and to his King. He then knelt, and with great fervour recited the *Miserere* psalm. He rose, and with light joyous step advanced towards the scaffold. Laying his head upon the block, he turned his beard aside with a smile, saying, 'This at least has committed no treason.'

When Henry heard of his death he was playing at chess with Anne Boleyn. Frowning upon her he said, 'You are the cause of this.' But his remorse was only superficial, for he gave orders that the head of More should be raised on a pole over London-bridge, his object being to strike terror into the hearts of his subjects by this ghastly display. For a whole month that venerable head was suspended over London-bridge. Daily did Henry and Anne pass beneath it insultingly, as they went in their barge from Greenwich to Westminster. Margaret, the beloved daughter of More, succeeded at last in securing that venerable relic, for which filial act she was cast, by Henry's orders, into the Tower. At the death of More, Henry seized upon all his chattels, and expelled his family from their house at Chelsea, which he gave to one Pawlet, to reward him for some infamous service. 'More is dead,' writes Pole; 'More, whose breast was

purer than snow, and whose genius was excellent above all his nation. His goodness has so engraven him on men's hearts that all lament his death, as if he were a father or a brother. I have seen tears flow from eyes that never saw him; yea, whilst I write my own tears flow against my will and blot my pages.'

Church of the English Martyrs,
Great Prescot-street, Tower Hill.

Appendix.

A SPIRITUAL CONSOLATION,

WRITTEN BY

JOHN FISHER, BISHOP OF ROCHESTER,
TO HIS SISTER ELIZABETH,

AT SUCH TIME AS HE WAS PRISONER IN THE TOWER OF LONDON.

Very necessary and commodious for all those that mind to lead a virtuous life; also to admonish them to be at all times prepared to die, and seemeth to be spoken in the person of one that was suddenly prevented by death.

2 Cor. vi. Behold now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation.

Matt. xxiiii. Watch, therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

A SPIRITUAL CONSOLATION,

WRITTEN BY

JOHN FISHER, BISHOP OF ROCHESTER,

TO HIS SISTER ELIZABETH.

Sister Elizabeth, nothing doth more help effectually to get a good and virtuous life than if a soul, when it is dull and unlustie without devotion, neither disposed to prayer nor to any other good work, may be stirred or quickened again by fruitful meditation. I have therefore devised unto you this meditation that followeth ; praying you for my sake, and for the weal of your own soul, to read it at such times as you shall feel yourself most heavy and slothful to do any good work. It is a manner of lamentation and sorrowful complaining made in the person of one hastily prevented by death (as I assure you every creature may be), none other surety we have living in this world here.

But if you will have any profit in reading of it, three things you must do in any wise. 1st, when you shall read this meditation, devise in your mind as nigh as you can all the conditions of a man or woman suddenly taken and ravished by death ; and think with yourself that ye were in the same condition so hastily taken, and that forthwith you must needs die, and your soul depart hence and leave your mortal body, never to return again for to make any amends or to do any release to your soul after this hour.

2dly, that ye never read this meditation but alone by yourself in secret manner, where you may be most attentive thereunto ; and when ye have the best leisure, without any let of other thoughts or business. For if you otherwise behave yourself in the reading of it, it shall anon lose the virtue and quickness in stirring and moving of your soul, when you would rather have it stirred.

3dly, that when you intend to read it you must afore lift up

your mind to Almighty God, and beseech Him that, by the help and succour of His grace, the reading thereof may fruitfully awake in your soul a good and virtuous life according to His pleasure, and say: 'Deus in adjutorium meum intende;' 'Domine ad adjuvandum me festina;' 'Gloria Patri,' &c.; 'Laus tibi Domine rex eternæ gloriæ. Amen.'

Alas, alas, I am unworthily taken all suddenly; Death hath assailed me; the pains of his stroke be so sore and grievous that I may not long endure them; my last home, I perceive well, is come; I must now leave this mortal body, I must now depart hence out of this world, never to return again into it. But whether I shall go, or where I shall become, or what lodging I shall have this night, or in what company I shall fall, or in what country I shall be received, or in what manner I shall be entreated, God knoweth, for I know not. What if I shall be damned in the perpetual prison of hell, where the pains are endless and without number; grievous it shall be to them that be damned for ever, for they shall be as men in most extreme pains of death, ever wishing and desiring death, and yet never shall they die. It should be now unto me much weary one year continually to lie upon a bed, were it never so soft; how weary then shall it be to lie in the most painful fire so many thousand of years without number; and to be in that most horrible company of devils, most terrible to behold, full of malice and cruelty! O, wretched and miserable creature that I am, I might so have lived and so ordered my life by the help and grace of my Lord Christ Jesu, that this hour might have been unto me much joyous and greatly desired.

Many blessed and holy saints were full joyous and desirous of this hour, for they knew well that by death their souls should be translated into a new life; to the life of all joy and endless pleasure; from the straits and bondage of this corruptible body into a very liberty and true freedom among the company of heaven; from the miseries and grievances of this wretched world, to be above with God in comfort inestimable that cannot be spoken or thought. They were assured of the promises of Almighty God, which had so promised to all them that be His faithful servants. And sure I am, that if I had truly and faithfully served Him unto

this hour, my soul had been partner of these promises. But unhappy and ungracious creature that I am, I have been negligent in His service, and therefore now my heart doth waste in sorrows, seeing the nighness of death, and considering my great sloth and negligence. I thought full little thus suddenly to have been trapped; but (alas) now Death hath prevented me, and hath unwarily attacked me, and suddenly oppressed me with his mighty power, so that I know not whither I may turn me for succour, nor where I may seek now for help, nor what thing I may do to get any remedy. If I might have leisure and space to repent me and amend my life, not compelled with this sudden stroke, but of my own free will and liberty, and partly for the love of God, putting aside all sloth and negligence, I might then safely die without any dread; I might then be glad to depart hence, and leave my manifold miseries and encumbrances of this world.

But how may I think that my repentance or mine amendment cometh now of mine own free will, since I was before this stroke so cold and dull in the service of my Lord God? Or how may I think that I do this more rather for His love than for fear of His puuishment, when if I had truly loved Him I should more quickly and more diligently have served Him heretofore? Meseemeth now that I cast away my sloth and negligence compelled by force. Even as a merchant that is compelled by a great tempest in the sea to cast his merchandise out of the ship, it is not to be supposed that he would cast away his riches of his own free will, not compelled by the storm. And even so likewise do I, if this tempest of death were not now raged upon me, it is full like that I would not have cast from me my sloth and negligence. O, would to God that I might now have some further respite, and some longer time to amend myself of my free will and liberty. O, if I might entreat Death to spare me for a season; but that will not be: Death in no wise will be entreated, delay he will none take, respect he will none give, if I would give him all the riches of this world; no, if all my lovers and friends would fall upon their knees and pray him for me; no, if I and they would weep (if it were possible) as many tears as there be in the seas drops of water, no piety may restrain

him. Alas, when opportunity of time was, I would not use it well, which if I had done, it would now be unto me more precious than all the treasures of a realm. For then my soul, as now, should have been clothed with good works innumerable, the which should make me not to be ashamed when I should come to the presence of my Lord God, where now I shall appear laden with sin miserably to my confusion and shame. But, alas, too negligently have I let pass from me my time, not regarding how precious it was, nor yet how much spiritual riches I might have got therein, if I would have put my diligence and study thereunto. For assuredly no deed that is, be it never so little, but it shall be rewarded of Almighty God. One draught of water given for the love of God shall not be unrewarded. And what is more easy to be given than water?

But not only deeds, but also the least words and thoughts shall be in likewise. O, how many good thoughts, deeds, and works might one think, speak, and do in one day, but how many more in one whole year! O, alas, my great negligence! O, alas, my foul blindness! O, alas, my sinful madness, that knew this well and would not put it in effectual execution! O, if now all the people of this world were present here to see and know the perilous condition that I am in, and how I am prevented by the stroke of death, I would exhort to take me as an example to them all, and while they have leisure and time to order their lives and cast from them sloth and idleness, and to repent them of their misbehaviour towards God, and to bewail their offences, to multiply good works, and to let no time pass by them unfruitfully. For if it shall please my Lord God that I might any longer live, I would otherwise exercise myself than I have done before. Now I wish that I may have time and space, but righteously I am denied. For when I might have had it I would not well use it; and therefore now when I would well use it I shall not have it. O, ye therefore that have and may use this precious time in your liberty, employ it well, and be not too wasteful thereof, lest peradventure when you would have it it shall be denied you likewise, as now it is to me. But now I repent me full sore of my great negligence, and right much I sorrow that so little I regarded the wealth and profit of my soul, but

rather took heed to the vain comforts and pleasures of my wretched body. O corruptible body, to whom I have served, whose appetites I have followed, whose desire I have procured, now dost thou appear what thou art in thy own likeness. That brightness of thy eyes, that quickness in hearing, liveliness in thy other senses by natural warmness, thy swiftness and nimbleness, thy fairness and beauty; all these thou hast not of thyself, they were but lent unto thee for a season; even as a wall of earth, that is fair painted without for a season with fresh and goodly colours, and also gilted with gold, it appeareth goodly for the time to such as consider no deeper than the outward craft thereof. But when at the last the colour faileth, and the gilding falleth away, then appeareth it in his own likeness. For then the earth plainly showeth itself. In likewise my wretched body, for the time of youth it appeareth fresh and lusty, and I was detained with the outward beauty thereof, little considering what naughtiness was covered underneath: but now it showeth itself. Now, my wretched body, thy beauty is faded, thy fairness is gone, thy lust, thy strength, thy loveliness, all is gone, all is failed. Now art thou then returned to thine own earthly colour. Now art thou black, cold, and heavy, like a lump of earth; thy sight is darkened, thy hearing is dulled, thy tongue faltereth in thy mouth, and corruption issueth out of every part of thee. Corruption was thy beginning in the womb of thy mother, and corruption is thy continuance. All things that ever thou receivest, were it never so precious, thou turnest into corruption, and naught came from thee at any time but corruption, and now to corruption thyself returnest; altogether right vile and lothly art thou become, where in appearance before you were goodly; but the good lines were nothing else but as a painting or a gilting upon an earthen wall. But I looked not so deep, I contented myself with the outward painting, and in it I took great pleasure; for all my study and care was about thee, either to apparel thee with some clothes of divers colours, either to satisfy thy desire in pleasant sights, in delectable hearings, in goodly smells, in sundry manner of tastings and touchings, either else to get thee ease and rest as well in sleep as otherwise. And provided, therefore, pleasant and delectable lodg-

ings, and to eschew tediousness in all these, not only lodgings, but also in apparel, meats, and drinks procured many and divers changes, that when thou wast weary of one then mightest thou content thyself with some other. O, alas, this was my vain study whereunto my wit was ready applied; in those things I spent the most part of my days. And yet was I never content long, but murmuring or grudging every hour for one thing or other. And what am I now the better for all this? what reward may I look for of all my long service? Or what great benefits shall I receive for all my great study, care, and diligence? Nothing better am I, but much the worse; much corruption and filth my soul thereby hath gathered, so that now it is made full horrible and lothly to behold.

Reward get I none other than punishment, either in hell everlasting, or at least in purgatory, if I may so easily escape. The benefits of my labour are the great cares and sorrows which I now am wrapped in. May not I think my wit to have been well occupied in this lewd and unfruitful business; have not I well bestowed my labour about this service of my wretched body; hath not my time been well employed in these miserable studies, whereof now no comfort remaineth, but only sorrow and repentance? Alas, I heard full often that such as should be damned should grievously repent themselves, and take more displeasure of their misbehaviour than ever they had pleasure before. And yet that repentance then should stand them in no stead, where a full little repentance taken in time might have eased them of all their pains.

This I heard and read full often, but full little heed or regard I gave thereunto. I well perceived it in myself, but all too late, I dread me. I would that now by the example of me all other might beware, and avoid by the gracious help of God these dangers that I now am in, and prepare themselves against the hour of death better than I have prepared me. Alas, what availeth me now any delicacy of meats and drinks, which my wretched body insatiable did devour? What availeth my vanity or pride that I had in myself, either of apparel or of any other thing belonging unto me?

Now these pleasures be gone my body is nothing better, my soul is much the worse, and nothing remaineth but sor-

row and displeasure, and yet a thousandfold more than ever I had any pleasure before. O body, which hast brought me to this utter discomfort; O corruption, now must I go to make answer for thy wickedness, thy wickedness I say, for it all cometh of thee. My soul had nothing need of such things as was thy desire; what need my soul, that is immortal, either clothing, or meat, or drink? What need it any corruptible gold or silver; what need it any houses or beds, or any other things that appertaineth to these?

For thee, O corruptible body, which like a decaying wall daily needeth repairs and botching up with meat and drink, and defence of clothing against cold and heat, was all this study and diligence taken; and yet now wilt thou forsake me at my most need, when account and reckoning of all our misdeeds must be given before the throne of the Judge most terrible. Now thou wilt refuse me, and leave me to the jeopardy of all this matter. O, alas, many years of deliberation suffice not before so great a Judge to make answer, which shall examine me of every idle word that ever passed my mouth.

O, then, how many idle words, how many evil thoughts, how many deeds have I to make answer for! and such as we set but at light, full greatly shall be weighed in the presence of His most high majesty. O, alas, what may I do to get some help at this most dangerous hour; where may I seek for succour; where may I resort for any comfort? My body forsaketh me, my pleasures be vanished away as the smoke, my goods will not go with me. All these worldly things I must leave behind me; if any comfort shall be, either it must be in the prayers of my friends, or in mine own good deeds that I have done before.

But as for my good deeds that should be available in the sight of God, alas, they be few, or none that I can think to be available. They must be done principally and purely for His love. But my deeds, when of their kind they were good, yet did I linger them by my folly. For either I did them for the pleasure of men, or to avoid the shame of the world, or else for my own affection, or else for dread of punishment. So that seldom I did any good deed in that purity and straightness that it ought of right to have been done. And my misdeeds, my lewd deeds that be shameful and abominable, be without

number; not one day of all my life, no not one hour, I trow, was so truly expended to the pleasure of God, but many deeds, words, and thoughts, miscaped me in my life. Alas, little trust then may I have upon my deeds. And as for the prayers of my friends, such as I shall leave behind me, of them many peradventure be in the same need that I am in. So that where their own prayers might profit themselves, they cannot so profit another. And many of them will be full negligent, and some forgetful of me. And no marvel, for who should have been more friendly unto me than mine own self? Therefore I, that was most bound to have done for myself, forget my own weal in my lifetime, no marvel, therefore, if others do forget me after my departing hence. Other friends there be by whose prayers souls may be holpen, as by the blessed and holy Saints above in heaven, which verily will be mindful of such as in earth here have devoutly honoured them before. But, alas, I had special devotion but to a few; and yet them I have so faintly honoured, and to them so coldly sued for favour, that I am ashamed to ask aid or help of them. At this time, indeed, I had more effectually meant to have honoured them, and more diligently to have commended my wretched soul unto their prayers, and so to have made them my special friends; but now death hath prevented me so, that no other hope remaineth but only in the mercy of my Lord God, to whose mercy I do now offer myself, beseeching Him not to look upon my deserts, but upon His infinite goodness and abundant piety. Alas, my duty had been much better to have remembered this terrible hour: I should have had this danger ever before my eyes; I should have provided therefore, so that now I might have been in a more readiness against the coming of death, which I knew assuredly would come at last, albeit I knew not when, where, or by what manner, but well I knew every hour and moment was to Him indifferent, and in His liberty. And yet my madness, ever to be sorrowed! Notwithstanding this uncertainty of His coming, and the uncertainty of the time thereof, I made no certain nor sure provision against this hour. Full often I took great study and care to provide for little dangers, only because I thought they might happen, and yet happened they never a deal. And but trifles they were in comparison of this. How much

rather should I have taken study and care for this so great a danger, which I knew well must necessarily fall unto me once! For this cannot be eschewed in nowise, and upon this I ought to have made good provision. For in this hangeth all our wealth; for if a man die well, he shall after his death nothing want that he would desire, but his appetite shall be satiate in every point at the full. And if he die amiss, no provision shall avail him that ever he made before.

This provision, therefore, is most effectually to be studied, since this alone may profit without other, and without this none can avail. O, ye that have time and space to make your provision against the hour of death, defer not from day to day like as I have done. For I often did think and purpose with myself that at some leisure I would have provided; nevertheless, for every frivolous business I put it aside, and delayed this provision always to another time, and promised with myself that at such a time I would not fail but to do it; but when that came another business arose, and so I deferred again unto another time. And so, alas, from time to time, that now death in the mean time hath prevented me; my purpose was good, but it lacked execution; my will was straight, but it was not effectual; my mind well intended, but no fruit came thereof. All for because I delayed so often and never put it in effect, that that I had purposed. And therefore delay it not as I have done, but before all other business put this first in surety, which ought to be chief and principal business. Neither building of colleges, nor making of sermons, nor giving alms, neither yet any other manner of business shall help you without this.

Therefore first, and before all things, prepare for this, delay not in any way; for if you do, you shall be deceived as I am now. And ever I thought, and said, and intended that I would make sure and not be deceived by the sudden coming of Death. Yet nevertheless I am now deceived, and am taken sleeping, unprepared, and that when I least weened of his coming, and even when I reckoned myself to be in most health, and when I was most busy, and in the midst of my matters. Therefore delay not you any farther, nor put your trust over much in your friends. Trust yourself while ye have space and liberty, and do for yourself now while you

may. I would advise you to do that thing that I, by the grace of my Lord God, would put in execution if His pleasure were to send me longer life. Recount yourself as dead, and think that your souls were in prison of purgatory, and that there they must abide till the ransom for them be truly paid, either by long sufferance of pain there, or else by suffrages done here on earth by some of your special friends. Be you your own friend, do you these suffrages for your own soul, whether they be prayers or alms, deeds or any other penitential painfulness. If you will not effectually and heartily do these things for your own soul, look you never that other will do them for you; and in doing them in your own persons, they shall be more available to you a thousandfold than if they were done by any other. If you follow this counsel and do thereafter, you be gracious and blessed; and if you do not, you shall doubtless repent your folly, but too late.